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ABSTRACT

In response to tighter school budgets and improved technology, a two-way interactive video was successfully used to provide an alternative "delivery system" for forensic competition. Two university sites were selected to organize and host an interactive video speech and debate tournament for area high school students. The program was completed quickly and efficiently. The speaking order in the individual events moved from hearing all the contestants from one site to all the contestants at the other site. Managers at each site were able to communicate with each other between speeches and at the end of the rounds via telephone. The judges' rankings and ratings were also communicated over the telephone, and a FAX machine transmitted the overall result sheets between sites. Managers' noted less physical strain at this tournament compared with regular tournaments, primarily because the interactive video setting took place in one room and minimized the normal "housekeeping" items. Moreover, the tournament managers were able to observe the students in actual competition, a benefit usually only experienced by debate coaches. This type of forensic tournament appears to hold great potential as a supplement to traditional tournament schedules. (Two appendixes containing descriptions of the electronic classroom and interactive video network system are attached.) (KEH)

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# TOURNAMENT MANAGEMENT VIA INTERACTIVE VIDEO COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS: MODELS AND MOTIVES

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# TOURNAMENT MANAGEMENT VIA INTERACTIVE VIDEO COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS: MODELS AND MOTIVES

Under normal circumstances, managing a forensic tournament effectively would be considered a relatively complex task requiring training and significant organization and leadership skills. However, when a tournament takes place on two university campuses seventy miles apart, the challenge of tournament management can become even more difficult. Such was the case during the winter of 1989-90 when North Dakota State University and the University of North Dakota worked together to offer the first interactive video speech and debate tournaments in the United States. The primary site was NDSU and the secondary site was UND.

The impetus for offering these tournaments came from three developments in North Dakota. Initially, budgets at many of the smaller schools in the state were being reduced due to cuts in support for educational programs at the elementary and secondary levels. With smaller budgets, schools were unable to travel to or attend as many tournaments as they had been previously accustomed. Another factor influencing the offering of the tournaments resulted from the presence of an interactive video network among four institutions in eastern North Dakota (NDSU, UND, Carrington Experiment Station, and the Jamestown State Hospital). One classroom at each site was equipped so that the institutions could "participate in a . . . four month demonstration project in cooperation with US West and Dakota

Central Rural Telephone" (Kenward, 1990). As Pietsch (1990) described:

> Two way interactive video is a technology that makes it possible for the instructor and students in several locations to see, hear, and talk to each other. This is accomplished with video cameras, monitors, microphones, and loudspeakers in each classroom.

(See attachment A for diagram of typical classroom setting, Pullen et. al, 1989, p. 5.) The potential for little or no travel for high schools in and around these host sites made the option attractive. Finally, through the network of the North Dakota Speech and Theatre Association (NDSTA), coaches from many schools were interested in some alternative "delivery systems" for providing forensic competition opportunities. Clearly, with budgets tightening and technology developing, an opportunity to experiment with forensic tournaments in a heavily rural state was an exciting challenge.

As the Directors of Forensics at NDSU and UND began discussing the possibility of offering a tournament via interactive video, the following questions arose:

(1) Could tournaments be offered for both individual events and debate using an interactive video communication system?

(2) Would participants, judges, coaches, and tournament managers find this new vehicle for delivery to be acceptable?

Some Preliminary Concerns

First and foremost, in order to offer tournaments using interactive video, there had to be a sufficient number of schools interested in participating in the experimental tournaments. At the 1989 convention of the NDSTA, several coaches from schools in Grand Forks and Fargo were approached about participating. As an incentive to participate, no entry fees were assessed. Six schools, including two from Grand Forks and four from the Fargo-West Fargo, ND, and Moorhead, MN areas were interested. Due to the proposed scale of the initial IE tournament, only two students from each school were invited to compete; one in a serious interpretation contest and the other in a public speaking category (persuasive speaking). Six contestants and six alternates were identified for each of the contest areas. For the debate portion of the tournament, four schools subscribed to the experiment and each provided one student for Lincoln-Douglas debate.

After being certain that there was interest in the experimental tournaments, the next step was to schedule the events on the video network system. Because the interactive video system could not handle multiple events within the same time period, setting dates and times for the tournament was important. The individual events tournament was scheduled on November 7, 1989, during a three hour time block, as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Interp Round | 3:00-4:00 p.m. |
| Persuasion Round | 4:15-5:15 p.m. |

Awards 5:25-6:00 p.m.

The debate tournament was scheduled over a four-day period, January 8-11, 1990, using an hour of time daily, as follows:

Debate between Contestants A and B Mon., 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Debate between Contestants C and D Tues., 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Debate between the losers of Round I Wed., 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Debate between the winners of Round I Thurs., 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Awards were presented to the debate participants following the consolation round on Wednesday and the Final Round on Thursday.

Familiarity with the equipment and its capabilities was necessary, requiring some training. An experienced technician was assigned to be present to assist with the actual transmission of the contestants' speeches during the tournament rounds.

Perhaps most important was the need for cooperation between the two tournament managers. Although the project was initiated and developed by the forensic staff at NDSU, its success could only be guaranteed if the forensic staff at UND also supported and "bought into" the idea as an equal partner. Both forensic directors had prior experience directing individual events and debate tournaments in traditional, "live" settings. Being able to communicate about what needed to be done was necessary and useful throughout the planning and execution of the tournaments.

Preparing for the Tournament Experience

All of the traditional tasks of scheduling a tournament had to be completed, including organizing contestants, finding judges, and completing paperwork. The contestants were chosen

from area high schools. Once identified, a master schedule was prepared and sent to the coach of each participating school by the primary site coordinator. A complete set of materials was also sent to the secondary site manager so that all information would be "common" among the managers. The information included where the interactive video classrooms were located, times for the rounds, and the telephone numbers of the two managers. Despite the availability of this information in advance of the tournament dates, the local managers still received telephone calls from coaches to check on the details. This prompted the need for frequent communication between managers regarding details of the actual tournament events.

The duty of finding judges was split between the two managers. Each manager found his/her own judges for the respective sites. For the individual events portion of the tournament, there were five judges (three at NDSU, two at UND). This was done to create a multiple judge panel for the single rounds of competition in the two IE events. There were three judges for each of the debate rounds. Two judges were scheduled at one site, one judge at the other. This ratio rotated between NDSU and UND so that neither site would be perceived as having an advantage over the other. The reactions of the judges varied prior to the tournament. Some of their questions included: "Do I have to give oral critiques?" "Do I need to do anything different for the cameras?" "What's involved with an interactive video tournament?" and even "What should I wear?" These

questions were sincere and demonstrated the interest of the judges in this project. The judges were not paid for their services.

Paperwork also needed to be completed in advance. Judging forms, schedules of events, and other routine information had to be sent to the secondary site a few days before the tournament. The information had to be complete and organized in advance because there was no time to send a second packet of information through the mail on the day of a tournament, should something be missing. This task was more complicated for the debate portion of the project due to the extended nature of the competition. Each day had to have its own envelope with ballots, schedules, and a return envelope ready to send the ballots to the students as quickly as possible.

On-Site Tournament Management

On the day of the tournament, there were several things to be taken into consideration. First of all, organization and timing were crucial. The interactive video equipment was paid for through grant funds on a strict time schedule. Consequently, judges, students, coaches, observers, and the technical staff had to be on time in order for the rounds to be held within the allotted time periods. Unlike traditional tournaments, the interactive video tournaments could not fall behind schedule without seriously affecting the outcome.

At the start of both the IE and debate tournaments, the tournament manager from the primary site gave opening remarks and

introduced the judges. Since it was hard to see both rooms through the monitors, contestants and judges were introduced one at a time while the cameras panned the audience. Once the procedural remarks were made, a few moments were used for final preparations at the two sites. This was also one reason why both managers had to have a clear understanding of all details. If a comment or question was beneficial for both sites, the volume was increased for all to hear.

Once the individuals were in place and the microphones were attached to the speakers, the tournament commenced. The speaking order in the individual events moved from hearing all of the contestants from one site, then moving to all of the contestants at the other site. Although the students were used to performing at tournaments, there was excitement and anticipation at both sites from the students who participated. During the students' performances, there had to be complete silence from the audiences at both sites. Any small movements or noises were picked up by the microphones. The managers needed to be constantly present to monitor the technical aspects of the tournament, including volume. Once a speaker began, there was no way to communicate with the other site without being disruptive. As a result, the managers and technical staffs quickly tuned into problems at their own sites and as unobtrusively as possible, corrected them.

There was a telephone available in the classrooms so that the managers could communicate with each other between speeches and at the ends of the rounds. The telephones enabled the

managers to discuss issues in relative privacy. However, if something needed to be said to everyone, the message was transmitted via the interactive video system. The judges' rankings and ratings were communicated over the telephone. A FAX machine was used to transmit the overall result sheets to the secondary site so the Grand Forks students would have immediate feedback on how they were ranked during the competition. Completed ballots were mailed by each manager to the other with the understanding that they would be distributed to the appropriate students at each site.

Related Activities Following the Tournament

Following the completion of the tournaments, all participants were asked to complete a simple questionnaire measuring their perceptions of the overall success of the tournament, their ability to see contestants and judges at the other site, their ability to hear contestants, and their ability to hear and see during the awards presentation. Contestants, coaches, and judges were asked to provide any perceived advantages, disadvantages, and/or physical or technical problems that interfered with their ability to perform via the interactive video network. All questionnaires were sent to the manager at the primary site. The data secured from these questionnaires was compiled and used by others studying the use of interactive video networks as a means for delivering competitive forensic opportunities to students (Sellnow and Krier, 1990; Hanson, 1990).

Because these tournaments were described as "pilot projects," the primary manager decided to present the participants with trophies. The individual events awards were presented at NDSU's High School Invitational Tournament in December; the debate awards were presented at the North Dakota High School State Debate Tournament in February.

Some Benefits of Managing Tournaments Via Interative Video

One unexpected benefit was that the tournament managers were able to see the students performing. Usually, the manager is quite busy taking care of "housekeeping" items. However, in the interactive video setting, everything took place in one room on each campus. There was no running around from room to room, no tab room to check on, and no individuals or judges to locate for emergencies. It may be possible that a larger, more extended interactive video would create some "running around," but in this project, everything took place in one room.

From a manager's point of view, there seemed to be less physical strain on the body at these tournaments compared with other tournaments. However, the psychological apprehensions were increased. The biggest fear was that something would happen to the equipment. Although there was confidence in the technical operators, there was always the unanticipated chance that something could go wrong. Fortunately, there were no problems at either of the two tournaments, leaving the participants with a relatively positive appreciation for the system as it now exists.

From a practical perspective, the managers were able to

observe the students in actual competition. Normally, a tournament director is too busy to judge at a tournament s/he hosts. These tournaments allowed managers to enjoy the same benefits that coaches routinely experience; that is, to see what the "competition" is doing.

Implications for the Future

The reactions of the students, coaches, and judges varied. For the most part, all seemed willing to participate in the experiment and went along with all of the technical aspects that may have seemed foreign to the traditional forensic tournament situation.

The future of this type of forensic tournament holds great potential for the state of North Dakota, and for any forensic programs in rural areas with access to sites where interactive video communication is possible. As the attached map of the state, with the respective sites marked, would indicate, this system will make access to forensic competition between students in eastern and western North Dakota more possible without seriously impacting transportation budgets (see Attachment B). A second impact of the system would be that coaching could be performed "at a distance" from the location of the students. Workshops and other programs to stimulate the growth of the forensic activity become imminently more possible.

Not everyone will use the two-way interactive video network but some will want to be a part of the system. This system will allow teachers and coaches of speech and debate activities to

offer forensic competition on another level for their students without the time and energy used for travel. By using the interactive video system to supplement the traditional tournament schedule, a forensic director may actually be able to stretch food and lodging budgets.

Using the video network to deliver forensic tournaments may be more complicated than traditional tournaments if managers are not well-prepared or organized in advance. Having all of the materials at the different sites takes planning and coordination. The need for contingency planning is also great. If something happen at one of the sites, short of massive technical difficulties, alternatives for delivering the required tournament materials should be anticipated.

Whatever the future holds, North Dakota has experimented with a new delivery system for offering individual events and debate tournaments. Now it is up to the leaders in the forensic community to determine if this interactive video model can be used in a productive way for the benefit of students throughout the country.

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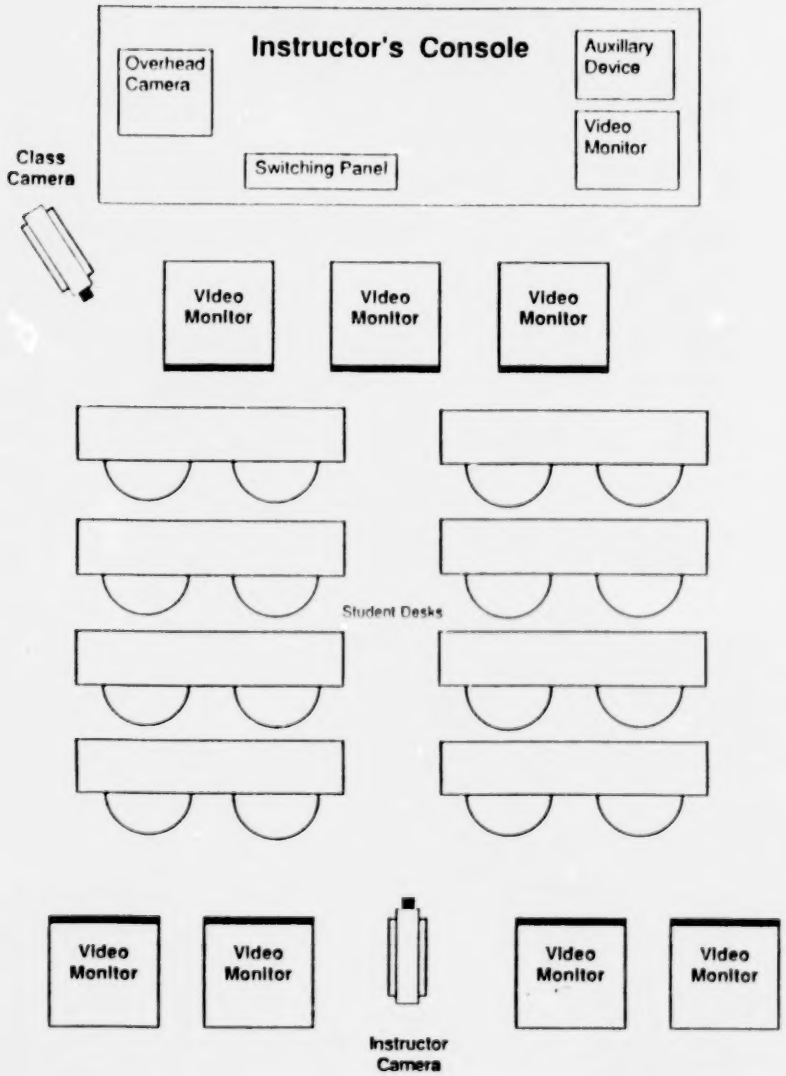
**What is an Electronic Classroom?**

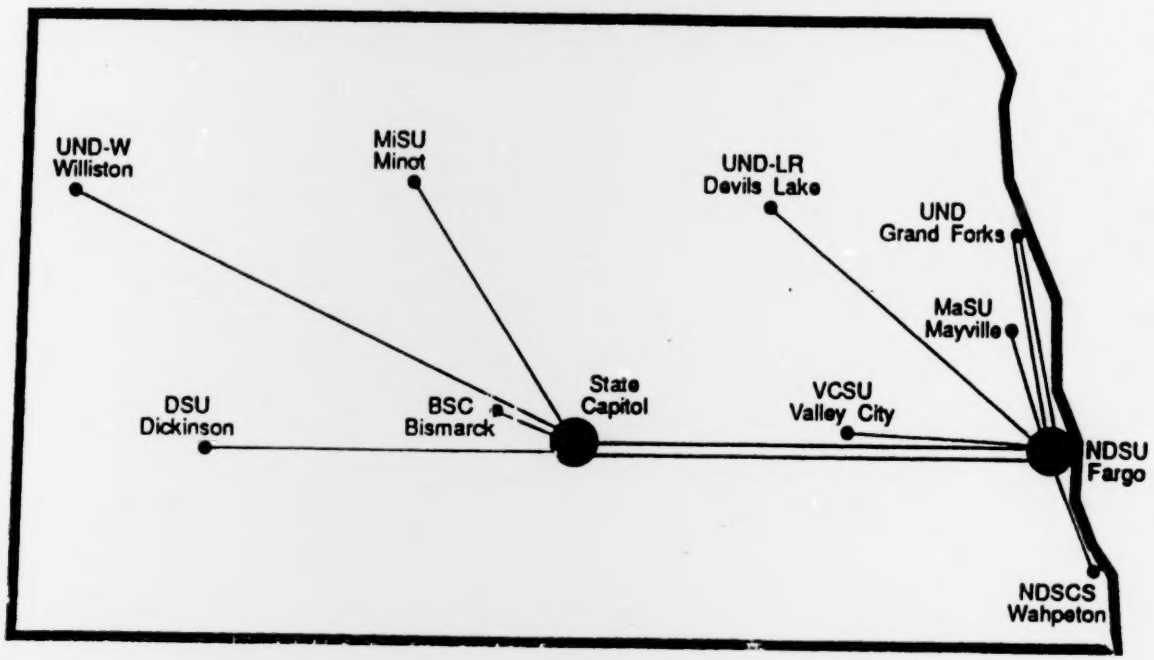
An **Electronic Classroom** is the room in which an instructor teaches a group of students, some of whom are in the home site classroom with the instructor, and others are in remote site classrooms. The electronic classroom contains student desks which face a group of video monitors with a system of speakers and a number of microphones and video cameras allowing the students to see and hear the instructor as well as the students in other remote sites.

## Electronic Classroom



Attachment B

# North Dakota
# Interactive Video Network

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